

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0045

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, ETRD, JM

SUBJECT: STRIKE WITHIN JAMAICA SUGAR INDUSTRY SETTLED

REF: A. KINGSTON 2149, B. KINGSTON 1013, C. KINGSTON 1087,
D. KINGSTON 0188

1. THE THREE-WEEK STRIKE OF MORE THAN 200,000 WORKERS IN THE JAMAICAN SUGAR INDUSTRY HAS ENDED AND THE MILES ARE EXPECTED TO START ROLLING AGAIN BY SATURDAY, MARCH 4. ELEVEN OF THE ISLAND'S TWELVE SUGAR PLANTS WERE SHUT DOWN AS WORKERS BACKED WAGE INCREASE CLAIMS SUBMITTED BY THE BUSTAMANTE INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNION (BITU) AND THE NATIONAL WORKERS UNION (NWU). THE SETTLEMENT WITH WORKERS PROVIDES AN INCREASE OF 20 PERCENT ACROSS THE BOARD ON ALL EXISTING RATES OF PAY.

2. AT A MEETING HELD UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF LABOR MINISTER WILLIAM ISAACS, THE BITU, NWU AND THE SUGAR PRODUCERS FEDERATION HAVE AGREED THAT A SPECIAL COMMITTEE WILL BE SET UP TO LOOK AT THE INDUSTRY. THE COMMITTEE IS TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERIM PENSION RATE PAYMENTS TO WORKERS WHO HAVE RETIRED SINCE JANUARY 1, 1977. THE COMMITTEE IS ALSO TO EXAMINE PROPOSALS FOR STANDARDIZATION OF RATES FOR SIMILAR OPERATIONS AT THE FACTORIES. THE NEW WAGE RATES
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WILL APPLY TO BOTH THE 1978 AND 1979 CROPS, BUT WORKERS WILL BE ENTITLED TO A BONUS ON GROSS EARNINGS FOR 1979.

3. THE SETTLEMENT WAS PREDICTED ON A DECISION BY THE SUGAR INDUSTRY AUTHORITY (SIA) TO INCREASE THE GUARANTEED PRICE TO THE PRODUCER FROM J\$270 TO J\$300 A TON. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THE WAGE PACT WILL COST THE INDUSTRY ABOUT

J\$3.2 MILLION. THE STRIKE ITSELF ENTAILED A LOSS ESTIMATED AT OVER J\$2 MILLION. THE PROJECTED OUTPUT FROM THE CROP HAS NOW BEEN LOWERED FROM 340,000 LONG TONS TO 300,000 LONG TONS.

4. COMMENT: THE AGREEMENT TO END THE STRIKE HAS COME AT AN OPPORTUNE TIME FOR A TOTTERING JAMAICAN ECONOMY. SEVERAL LOCAL INDUSTRIES WHICH DEPEND SUBSTANTIALLY ON SUGAR AS A RAW MATERIAL HAVE BEEN LAYING OFF WORKERS. HOWEVER, THE CRISIS IS NOT YET OVER AS SETTLEMENT BETWEEN THE PRODUCERS AND WORKERS AT THE SUGAR WAREHOUSE IN KINGSTON IS YET TO BE ARRIVED AT. THIS DISPUTE INVOLVES THE DOCKERS AND MARINE WORKERS UNION (DMWU) AND IT MAY BE SOMETIME BEFORE PLACES LIKE THE MILK CONDENSERY, SOFT DRINK MANUFACTURERS AND FRUIT CANNERS MAY COME BACK INTO FULL OPERATION.
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